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Ambassador Edward J. Perkins Sworn in as Director General of Foreign Service and Director of Personnel

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Following are remarks by Ambassador Edward J. Perkins, Director General of the Foreign Service and Director of Personnel, at his swearing-in ceremony at the Department of State, Washington, D.C., October 5, 1989.

It is a happy and gratifying occasion, yet a humbling one. Thank you, Mr. Secretary, for officiating at this swearing-in. Your presence indicates your confidence in the men and women who make up the Foreign and Civil Service here and at our posts abroad.

I also wish to acknowledge the presence of many guests from the Congress, from within the Department of State, and from various agencies of our government and other institutions. Your presence is very welcome, signifying as it does, the partnership nature of the management of foreign relations.

All of us who take our oath of office know that to serve faithfully means that we serve the American people loyally through each Administration elected by them. That is our tradition of service and one which I will continue with vigor.

Let me also say, Mr. Secretary, that the men and women of this Department are fully supportive of you and are ready at all times to take on whatever role is needed to carry out and manage our foreign relations. We are proud of our tradition of performing loyally and with distinction as people of integrity and intelligence who are dedicated to achievement. That has been our past tradition, and I expect that it will be just as true during my tenure.

As in the past, the Foreign and Civil Services today are facing new challenges. That means new requirements are levied on us as practitioners of an ancient but consistently changing craft.

Foreign relations has an esoteric nature these days. We are concerned about the law of the sea, managing our environment on a bilateral and multilateral basis, and we are intensifying the fight against international narcotics production and traffickers. We are also managing and solving regional disputes in a manner which takes into account the best interests of our country and of the world. We are also cognizant of the changing nature of the bipolarism, which in earlier years characterized our relations with the Soviet Union.

The Department must continually change in order to be able to take on these new challenges and responsibilities. I should state at the outset that the primary purpose of being in the Foreign Service is service abroad. Second to that are a combination of other relative factors which, taken together, make us highly qualified to manage foreign relations of varying complexities here in Washington or at posts or assignments abroad.

I take on my new duties faced with two reports recommending changes in the Foreign Service. I also believe we need to effect changes that will further strengthen the implementation of the Foreign Service Act of 1980. During the last few months, senior members of the Bureau of Personnel have looked at the two reports and recommended that certain portions of each report be accepted and implemented.

Overall, what we seek is a tightly knit Foreign Service, able to take on whatever task comes its way and able, in the longer term, to meet the needs of the Secretary of State and the President. In order to do this, over the next year we will be implementing certain portions of each report. It is appropriate that I mention in general terms some of the areas which will be affected over the coming months.

Our recruitment procedures are undergoing changes. We must initiate a testing or a screening procedure which will eliminate, insofar as possible, biases against women and minorities. We will also give attention to the overall issue of selecting the kinds of Foreign Service persons able to deal with the challenges of the changes in our modern society.

We will also redefine the concept of both the formal and informal training given to officers entering the service. We need to be able to predict a career path, so that we know to the degree possible the likelihood that an employee selected will be successful as a Foreign Service officer. The officer, on the other hand, must have sufficient time to be exposed to a number of functions to allow him to have a reasonable idea as to whether he or she would like to stay in the service and in what specialty.

The process of tenuring and initial coning then must undergo change. Our conal structure has been examined often in the history of the Foreign Service. Each examination has been done with the idea that, whatever the structure, it must meet the needs of the institution as well as those of the employee. We thus ask ourselves now how the cone system can be structurally altered. We have come to the conclusion that it must be changed somewhat. Following appropriate consultation, we'll make our views known in this regard in the coming weeks.

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Training, as a general rule, must be linked with an onward or a current assignment. The philosophy of training is to better prepare a Foreign or Civil Service employee to manage an increasing array of functions successfully. Those who do not accept training will begin to feel that they are less and less prepared to do what the institution wants them to do. They will become less and less competitive for promotions and valued assignments.

Also, in the context of assignments and training, the assignment cycle will be altered somewhat. Assignments must be made more quickly. For example, all career ambassadorial nominees for the year following should be completed during August of the year before. Deputy Chiefs of Missions and principal officers should be selected in the early fall. Then the greater bulk of the Foreign Service members eligible for transfer the following year will be assigned sooner and with greater consideration of the officers' desires and the requisite training.

There has been a feeling for some time that promotion and selection out are areas requiring change. We intend to study these areas with great care. There are basic principles at stake here. The service must remain an up-or-out system or risk stagnation; the promotion system, while it will never be without risks to the employee, must be stable enough so that employees can reasonably foresee the periods in their lives when they will be at greatest risk.

Also, we must never forget that if we have done our selection job properly, all our officers are highly talented. Lack of promotion does not, therefore, mean failure but rather should be viewed as an honorable end to a responsible, challenging, and exciting career.

In designing these and some other contemplated changes, we seek to strengthen implementation of the Foreign Service Act of 1980. By their range, these changes will strengthen our service, provide more flexibility, create more guidance, and be more complementary to members.

Equally important, we must give attention to specialists and to secretaries. We hope soon to undertake a study of the specialist system in the service. We will look at specialists in terms of the requirements imposed on them in these changing times, the training necessary to take on current and possibly more complex future assignments, plus the management of a specialist's career. We are also exploring methods to enhance Civil Service career ladders and will be looking into linking training to career development.

The changing world of work involving managers and secretaries demands our immediate attention. The secretarial corps, both Foreign and Civil Service, must be looked at. We have received any number of recommendations suggesting change, or at least a change in philosophy, toward the role of the secretary.

Most recommendations suggest that secretaries are capable of performing an, as yet, unquantified range of additional functions. Should these recommendations be enacted, a more balanced use of secretarial resources will evolve. We are presently vetting the recommendations received from our various audiences. I have also met with a number of secretaries since I have been on board. I am not yet ready to suggest how we are going to deal with this opportunity, for I see every problem as an opportunity. However, we will soon be issuing a description and evaluation of what new secretarial functions can be. Top personnel, that is, assistant secretaries, deputy assistant secretaries, and ambassadors, must be in the forefront in developing the resource we have in our talented secretaries.

We must also achieve a representative workforce in our Foreign and Civil Service. I take it as a given that the Department must lead the way in showing the ranges of diversity of our country. The expectation of our involvement around the world is that we manifest the grand experiment that America has so successfully managed so far.

Thus, I am committed to a representative service with a healthy representation of women and minorities at all levels of our Foreign and Civil Service. I also wish to acknowledge, Mr. Secretary, your strong support and that of the Deputy Secretary for both affirmative action and a representative Foreign Service and Civil Service.

I expect that we will move to strengthen recruitment efforts by narrowing our focus on people and institutions where candidates of all types can be found. As far as minorities are concerned, colleges and universities most likely to be representative of various minorities are our targets. Similarly, we will give our attention to institutions outside the education sphere, such as the church and community organizations.

In addition to recruiting, there is another important reason for doing this outreach work. We must take the foreign policy story to more Americans in general and to more minority communities especially.

It has always been a truism that those who serve the American people do so with full knowledge that the American people must be kept informed. I take this to mean that we must explain the making of foreign policy, the improvement of it, and the final analysis of what we have done, plus the effect it has on our individual lives. I am convinced that, in turn, we will receive a healthy appreciation of what we do from an outside point of view.

I also pledge to you that my tenure as Director General will be marked by the most open communications possible—with the Hill, within the management structure, and with each and every element of our Foreign and Civil Service staffs.

I look forward with a great deal of anticipation to serving as Director General and Director of Personnel. The challenges are many, not the least of which is understanding and articulating new foreign policy issues which will occasion different functions in our service. I look on the future as being bright for both the Civil and Foreign Service, offering even greater opportunities to display excellence and achievement so characteristic of the men and women who have served well since the inception of the Foreign Service in the late 1800s.

In conclusion, let me summarize my approach as follows. I care deeply about the people of the State Department. I care deeply about our personnel systems—Civil and Foreign Service. But most of all I care deeply about the reason for the existence of these systems—the United States of America. We are here to serve the people and their President as we continue our democratic experience.

As an ex-Marine, I hesitate to use this phrase, but our country and the State Department deserve a personnel system that will allow each and every one of us to: "Be all that we can be!" ■